

Opportunity to Protect the Low Elevation Boreal Forest

Lassiter Properties Inc. and Upstate Timberland Holdings LP recently announced a plan to sell roughly 54,000 acres of their lands located in Clinton, Franklin, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties in the Adirondack Park. This provides an extraordinary opportunity for the State of New York, or an interested conservation buyer, to acquire lands that have long been considered biologically unique to the Adirondacks.

Of particular biological significance are the properties located northwest of the Town of Tupper Lake and east of Route 56, in an area identified as "Low Elevation Boreal Forest." This habitat type is unique to New York State in that it represents a biome typically found much farther north: the northern, or boreal, coniferous forest biome or taiga. This biome exists in only two places in the Adirondacks, at high elevations on mountain summits, and at low elevations in the northwestern region of the Park. The Adirondack Council strongly urges the state or a conservation buyer to consider options for protecting this land now available for sale within this ecological gem.

The Adirondack Council First to Propose Protection of the Boreal Forest

The Adirondack Council first proposed protection for this area in our [2020 VISION publication, Volume 1: Saving all the Pieces](#) (p. 23). At the time the publication was released in 1988, less than twenty percent of the boreal biome was included in Adirondack Forest Preserve, and the biological significance of what did exist in Forest Preserve was further diminished because it was made up of numerous scattered parcels rather than a contiguous ownership. Thus, the Adirondack Council proposed a [Low Elevation Boreal Heritage Reserve](#) in which acquisitions would consolidate some of these parcels and "would result in a reserve large enough for all boreal species, including the moose, to survive. Furthermore, it would provide the public an opportunity to visit and enjoy the rarest biome in New York State."

Protection of the low elevation boreal habitat was highlighted again in the Adirondack Council's [2020 VISION - Volume 2: Completing the Adirondack Wilderness System](#) (p. 16). This report delineated potential boundaries for a [Proposed Boreal Wilderness](#) that would "encompass 73,300 acres including all of the Jordan River, major reaches of the Raquette (14 miles) and the St. Regis (13 miles) rivers, and the central core of the proposed Low Elevation Boreal Reserve."



A Common Loon with chick. Loons, a state species of special concern, are found in the Boreal Forest

New York State Also Recognizes Importance of Boreal Forest

The significance of this area has been recognized by the state as well. In 1990, the Commission on the Adirondacks in the Twenty-First Century, under the leadership of Governor Mario Cuomo, referenced the Boreal Forest in its report titled *The Adirondack Park in the Twenty First Century*. When highlighting their recommendations on Forest Preserve Acquisition, the Commission stated that the first criteria considered be Biological Diversity, particularly "Land representing all biomes in the Park ...including low and high elevation boreal...which are not currently in public ownership in amounts adequate to assure their preservation..." (p. 54).

More recently, the boreal forest was referenced in the 2006 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan, which states that the Low Elevation Boreal Forest area was identified through public comment as

important to the future of the Park. The plan states that "because of its unusual character the Low Elevation Boreal Forest in the Adirondack Park should be protected through a combination of additional state and private conservation ownership, conservation easements and incentives for private landowners to manage their land to support and protect boreal species."

A report produced by the [New York Natural Heritage Program](#) titled *Raquette Boreal Forest: Rare Species & Significant Ecological Communities* (2002) contains a wealth of information on the biological composition and unique plant and animal species of the area. The Raquette Boreal Forest supports populations of five rare animal species including the Spruce Grouse (a state endangered species), the Common loon (a state species of special concern), the Extra-striped snaketail dragonfly (a state species of special concern, (*the Raquette River is just one of four rivers in the state currently known to support this dragonfly)), the Brook snaketail and the Forcinate emerald. It also has a number of boreal specialist bird species including the gray jay, the black-backed woodpecker, the boreal chickadee, the yellow bellied flycatcher and the olive-sided flycatcher. The Raquette Boreal Forest includes two rare plant species: dung moss and



Spruce Grouse - A New York State Endangered Species

Farwell's watermilfoil (located in the shallows of Kildare Pond). In addition, it contains the largest Black Spruce Tamarack Bog in the state, and the second largest spruce-fir swamp in the state. The presence of the Spruce Grouse in this area is of great significance as it is a New York State endangered species. The NYS Spruce Grouse Recovery team stated the first priority for "management and research actions needed to protect, maintain and enhance populations" as "protection of currently occupied sites."

For roughly the past two decades, the Low Elevation Boreal Forest has been recognized by scientists and planners as a highly significant wild area to be protected. The opportunity now exists to consolidate even more of this Boreal habitat. The Adirondack Council strongly advocates that the State of New York consider options to acquire the Lassiter Timberland properties that lay within the Boreal Biome.